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Health Risks Associated with Ash & Windy Conditions

Blowing ash from fire affected areas can be hazardous.

Blowing ash can be irritating to the skin, nose, throat and lungs and may cause coughing. Ash can be especially hazardous for young children, the elderly, individuals with heart conditions and individuals with respiratory ailments such as asthma, emphysema and bronchitis.

When in fire affected areas during windy conditions, individuals should limit physical activity to avoid breathing ash and wear long sleeved shirts and pants to avoid skin contact. If you get ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible to avoid irritation. Use eye protection such as glasses, sun glasses or goggles. Well-fitting dust masks, if worn properly, may provide some airway protection. A NIOSH-approved mask rated N-95 or P-100 that forms a close seal on the face will be more effective in blocking particles than simple surgical or dust masks. These are available in many hardware stores. Look for masks with two straps, and position one at the back of the neck and the other at the crown of the head. If you cannot get a close face seal, try a different model or size.

Residents with health conditions who live near the fire affected areas should be prepared to stay indoors, limit their activity and use the "recirculation" function on the air conditioner instead of drawing air with ash from outdoors. The use of masks is not recommended for people with lung diseases such as asthma or emphysema, elderly people, and others who may have trouble breathing with masks.

Seek medical attention for symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness or shortness of breath.

If possible, check on friends and neighbors who may need assistance.
